

How To Create a Short Animated Story

Written by Sven Nilsen

The Ingredients

There are three ingredients in a story that makes it exciting, entertaining and funny:

- A character that the viewer sympathises with
- A need or problem that has to be solved
- A secret way of solving the problem that we'll discover through the movie

All you tools you need is

- Some free hours to think
- A pencil and a piece of paper
- A stop watch!

First, create the idea of the story by deciding the three ingredients.

The Character

A character doesn't need to be very special. Choose someone that is more like you and me. You can also use animals that can talk or walk like humans, or you can choose an animal that behaves like an animal. The important thing is that the viewer can feel what the character thinks or are about to do.

It's also important that the character can move around, so we can follow him into new worlds and discover new things. No main character is ever staying at the exact same spot forever, that will not be an entertaining story! The main character is always traveling and we with him.

Example characters:

1. A little boy
2. A little girl
3. A man
4. A woman
5. A pig
6. A frog
7. A horse
8. An elf
9. A troll
10. A fish
11. A bird

So how do we sympathise with the character? All character has some limitations that makes we feel sorry for him or recognize ourselves. Just add the feeling that we are on the same team as the main character.

For example:

1. Being poor
2. Having no friends
3. Wants to do good things in a bad environment
4. Wants to fly (everybody wants to fly)
5. Boring, nothing to do
6. Nobody notice him
7. Wants to help somebody

The Need

You don't need to solve the limitations of the character in the end of the story. For example, a poor boy saving a captured friend from an dangerous enemy can still be poor in the end. Being poor doesn't count, because the important thing is that he saved his friend.

The need is the very important thing in the movie. If many things go bad except the one thing, there's still an happy ending. In the other way, if everything is good except the one thing, there's a bad ending.

Remember "If the end is good, everything is good".

For example:

1. Have a friend
2. Overcome a dangerous enemy
3. Bring medicine to a sick person
4. Find a treasure
5. Save a captured person
6. Survive a snow storm
7. Find a holy statue
8. Solve a mystery

The Secret Solution

I bet you already half made the story in your head. Now the tricky part remains: To find a secret weapon.

For example:

1. To make a dragon become your friend by saying a secret spell from a magical book
2. Survive a snow storm by digging a cave in the snow
3. Solve a mystery by notice things that nobody else have seen

It's very important that nobody knows the secret solution before the end of the story. Once they find out, the story will be no more exciting. Don't tell the secret solution to anybody before they have seen the movie. You can tell about the character and the need and they will get curious. The secret solution is why people want to see the end of the story.

Planning

Write It Down

Divide the paper into equal rectangles.
Then draw or write the story scene by scene in each rectangle.
It will be like creating a comic stripe.
That's what we call a "storyboard".

Measure The Time

Use the stop watch to decide how long each scene takes.
You can try imaging the play inside your head (research shows that we dream the same speed as they happen). Or, if you got room and clothes, try to set up a small act. This is very funny with more people like a class.

Write down the time below each rectangle. You can use that time to figure out how long the movie will be.

Add The Details

For each scene, you need to write down details about every scene in a paper.
To refer to each scene, you can use numbers.

For example:
Scene 1 is A0010
Scene 2 is A0020

By jumping 10 numbers for each scene you can add new scenes between them later. To work with additional story lines, use A, B, C and so further in the beginning.

Describe the environment, the feel and sounds in each scene. What is happening, which characters will be there, what they say and what they do.

You can use colors in the background that make the feelings stronger, and adjectives like «dark» or «shiny» in the description. For example a sunset is normally very dramatic. What makes the main character feel safe or in danger?

ANIMATION

Use the time below each storyboard drawing to decide the length of each animation. It's important that the scenes are not too long and not too short. Often you need some kind of action between each shot to help the viewer follow the story. If you need a jump in time like «the next morning», you can add additional scenes with silent pictures or environment sound changes.

It's very efficient to use *Cutout Pro Stickman* to animate a story. Stickman is an animation software where you control the cartoon characters like puppets. You will find it on this web page:

<http://www.stickman-animation.com>

It includes many premade characters and you can visit the StickmanWiki to find more figures:

<http://www.stickman-animation.com/wiki>

Use Elemento (included with Stickman) to create backgrounds and items. These can be added to the scene in Stickman. You can also draw the background with MS Paint, Photoshop or scan from paper and add use *File->Import->Add Picture...* in Stickman.

GOOD LUCK!